

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Erik Goldstein, The First World War
Peace Settlements, 1919-25.
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The horrors and vast scale of the First World War spurred the development of ideas for ways to prevent the recurrence of conflict. Interest in some form of general international organization had been discussed by several generations of publicists.¹ The collapse of the old concert system, combined with hopes of creating lasting peace and security, now impelled the Allied powers to convert these proposals into policy. By the time the Armistice was signed it was clear that the creation of a League of Nations would be part of any peace settlement. Woodrow Wilson had called for such an organization in the Fourteen Points [Doc. 3], as had Lloyd George in his Caxton Hall speech of January 1918 [Doc. 2] when he declared the creation of a similar body as being among Britain's three preconditions for establishing a permanent peace. The French government had also been working on plans for an international organization.

The concept of a League of Nations grew out of several earlier developments. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries philosophers such as William Penn and Emmanuel Kant, among others, had proposed schemes for perpetual peace. The nineteenth century saw substantive steps to promote international peace, one of which was the search for mechanisms to prevent war. This effort reached a critical stage at the Hague conferences of 1899 and 1907, which sought to establish judicial mechanisms for resolving conflict. A second step was the growth of international organizations that promoted international cooperation, beginning with the Universal Postal Union in 1875. While non-political, they provided evidence of the efficacy of international cooperation. The Allied experience of wartime cooperation through joint Allied commissions controlling raw materials, shipping and trade provided further evidence of the utility of cooperation. An added factor was that many blamed the secret diplomacy of the prewar era for the drift to war and Wilson had proposed that the solution to this was Open Diplomacy. It was envisaged that the League would provide a forum for such open diplomacy, where all treaties and agreements between states would be deposited and published. During the war public pressure groups

emerged to support the idea, such as the League to Enforce Peace in the United States and the League of Nations Society in Britain.

THE PEACE CONFERENCE

All the major powers had been evolving plans for this new international organization. Léon Bourgeois of France had been working on such ideas for many years and, in 1917, became head of a French government committee to draw up a firm proposal. The French plan called for a much stronger League than that envisaged by the other powers, with mandatory membership and a requirement for all members to participate in implementing League decisions, where necessary, through the use of military, naval, and economic means. France saw the League as providing for mutual defence through a common military force with its own staff, similar to the Allies' Supreme War Council that had provided for unity of planning and control during the war. Much of this scheme was perceived by the other states as a means to help assure French security in the event of any renewed German aggression (France proposed that the League military force be based on its frontier with Germany), and it attracted little support.

In the final design of the League of Nations British ideas were particularly influential. British efforts to study how to implement the general concept of an association of nations began in earnest immediately after Lloyd George's Caxton Hall speech, with the establishment of a committee under Lord Phillimore, a noted jurist. Among the more significant recommendations of the Phillimore Committee was that force in the form of military and economic sanctions should be used if necessary to bring disputing states to international arbitration. Such states would be bound to attempt reconciliation, which naturally meant delay and which it was hoped would allow passions to cool. It was when states avoided this process that the other members of the system would drag them into a conference to settle the matter. It was also proposed that the members bind themselves not to go to war with each other, to use arbitration and, in the last resort, for members to go to war with a state which refused arbitration. The procedure for arbitration was an ad hoc affair, resembling the ambassadors' conferences of the prewar order. The Phillimore proposals did not go as far as later plans, which called for an organization with a full-time staff located at a permanent headquarters. Rather, the Phillimore Committee supported the creation of an agreed machinery to be activated in times of international stress.

These ideas were further developed in two reports by Foreign Office experts, which appeared in November 1918. The first, by Lord Eustace Percy, recommended that Britain should support the formation of a League of Nations that would promote regular, international consultation and that

would have a permanent, international secretariat. While the original members would be the Allied powers, Percy considered that the new states of Europe and the neutrals should be invited to join. This new league would act as guarantor of the whole peace settlement and of the political and territorial integrity of its members. Percy envisaged this guarantee as being both collective and individual, thus allowing room for states to exercise independent judgement. He proposed that Britain should put forward the Phillimore Committee's report as the best scheme for the peaceful settlement of disputes. Percy believed it to be advisable to concentrate first on establishing a league along these lines, while leaving such volatile and potentially divisive issues as disarmament, freedom of the seas, and equality of trade conditions for future consideration. If too many issues were thrust upon the league at birth, he feared that it would be unable to cope.

Percy's report was supplemented by one by Alfred Zimmern that followed a similar line in recommending a permanent organization charged with arranging regular conferences. He suggested, however, that, while the League's guarantee of peace should be permanent, it would be wiser if all other treaties were not concluded for a duration exceeding ten years, when they could be renewed. He argued that long-term treaties were not consistent with the principles of state sovereignty. Zimmern, Percy, and the Phillimore Committee all concurred that the coercive power of the League should be limited to occasions when arbitration had either been refused or an arbitral award ignored.

Lord Robert Cecil, a junior minister in the government, had long been interested in the idea of a League of Nations and, in December, he submitted his own scheme for such an organization. The Cecil Plan synthesized the common points of the earlier proposals, with regular conferences acting as the pivot of the League's activities. Cecil went a step further than the earlier proposals in suggesting that the League should have an independent capital, with a chancellor as its chief executive officer.

The most notable contribution from Britain, though, was made by Jan Smuts, the South African statesman placed in charge of British preparations for the peace conference by Lloyd George. Smuts argued that the ordinary conception of the League of Nations was not a fruitful one and that a radical transformation was required. He observed that with the destruction of the old European empires and the passing of the old European order a vacuum had been created which could only be successfully filled by a powerful league. He did not perceive such an organization as acting only to help in the prevention of wars, but rather as something that would play an integral part in the ordinary peaceful existence of people. The experience the Allies had already gained during the war in cooperating on the control and rationing of food and raw materials provided a useful precedent that could be used to extend economic cooperation through the League in peacetime.

Smuts firmly opposed a peace of annexations and he proposed that all territories surrendered by the defeated states, not yet considered ready for self-government, should be placed under the supervision of the League. The Great Powers would assist in the development of the regions formerly under Russian, Habsburg, and Ottoman rule. Smuts did not exclude Germany from participating in this work, once stability had been restored in that country. His plan would have given the Great Powers extensive control in eastern Europe, Siberia, and Western Asia.

Smuts's proposals on the organization of a League drew heavily on his experiences of the relationship between Great Britain and the Dominions. His aim was neither to create a super-state, nor simply to establish an office for organizing conferences. Smuts wanted an organization of sufficient suppleness and flexibility to be able to adapt to the evolving needs of the international system. He proposed that the League have a two-tier system, comprising a council and a general conference. He agreed with the earlier proposals for a secretariat, and for the settlement of disputes along the lines suggested by the Phillimore Committee. War was not outlawed, but the system would do everything possible to prevent it by delay and arbitration.

The council was to be the permanent nucleus of the League, which would supervise the variety of tasks with which Smuts hoped the League would be charged. Smuts introduced an innovation by suggesting that the council be comprised of two classes of members. The Great Powers would sit as permanent members while the remaining states would be classified as intermediate and minor powers, each group being allowed two seats on the Council by rotation. Three adverse votes would be sufficient to defeat a resolution. The lower tier of this system was a General Conference that would meet periodically. Smuts concluded his proposals by focusing on what he perceived as the cause of militarism, which the League could assist in eliminating. He called for the abolition of conscription, the limitation of armaments, and the nationalization of armaments production with League inspection. Much of what Smuts proposed was based on the conclusions of the Phillimore, Zimmern, and Percy plans, modified by several further suggestions, and has remained a part of modern international organizations. The British government decided to try to achieve the creation of a League of Nations along the lines proposed by these schemes, and at Paris this early work played an important role in the shaping of this innovation in the development of the international system.

Wilson did not himself set out definite plans for a League, but rather arrived at the peace conference intending to place the drafting of a plan of organization for the League of Nations ahead of other work, before it could be shunted aside by the more technical details of peacemaking. Wilson was aware that there would be imperfections in any settlement and envisaged one of the purposes of the League would be to act as a mechanism for

subsequent adjustment of imperfections, as well as for enforcing the terms of the peace. Wilson had been kept informed of British ideas on the subject and had integrated many of those ideas into his own thinking as it evolved.

A draft plan was worked out by the British and American legal advisers, the Hurst–Miller plan, which took into account Wilson's basic premise and the most favoured ideas that had developed out of the British process. This draft formed the basis for negotiations between all the allies at Paris, and was substantially the basis for the final constitution of the League of Nations, the Covenant, which was incorporated into the peace treaties with Germany, Austria, Bulgaria, and Hungary. As a result, the League did not formally come into being until the first treaty came into effect in January 1920.

The Covenant consisted of twenty-six articles. Articles 1–7 dealt with issues of membership; Articles 8–9 with disarmament and arms control; Article 10 promised mutual respect for other members' territorial integrity and political independence and for joint protection from external aggression [*Doc. 8*]; Article 11 allowed members to appeal to the Council to discuss disputes [*Doc. 8*]; Articles 12–15 dealt with methods for resolving disputes; Article 16 obligated members to take prompt action against any member which went to war in violation of the Covenant and gave the Council the power to expel erring states; Article 17 gave members the same protection against non-members as agreed in the Covenant; Articles 18–21 concerned the impact of the Covenant on other treaties and for the publication of all treaties; Article 22 established the mandates system; Articles 23–25 concerned the League's desire to improve international cooperation in areas of mutual concern which would be accomplished through the establishment of various subsidiary bodies and for bringing within the League structure existing bodies; and Article 26 provided provisions for amending the Covenant.

WILSON, UNITED STATES REJECTION, AND ARTICLE 10

With the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, which included the covenant, this phase of the peace settlement was concluded and President Wilson returned to the United States, where he encountered growing opposition to the treaty. The Republicans, who formed a majority of 49 to 47 in the Senate (where the treaty required a two-thirds vote for ratification), were generally negative about the treaty. Wilson had insisted of the Allies that the Covenant of the new League of Nations be incorporated as an integral part of the peace treaty. The Republican opposition was led by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, the chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Opposition focused on what were perceived as infringements of the Monroe Doctrine, widely seen as encapsulating the fundamental

necessities of American foreign policy. Already in March 1919, after a brief mid-conference visit to Washington, Wilson had agreed to move to amend the Covenant to address these concerns, clarifying that domestic issues such as immigration and tariffs were exempt from the purview of the League, and adding provisions for withdrawal. After some difficulties with the Allied leaders Wilson's desired modifications were made.

Wilson's modifications, however, were not enough to assuage his opponents who, upon his return, launched a political offensive against the Covenant. In a desperate gamble Wilson took his case directly to the people, crossing the country in a remarkable campaign to enlist popular support. On 25 September 1919, in the midst of this campaign Wilson suffered a debilitating stroke at Pueblo, Colorado, from which he never fully recovered. The Republicans continued to argue that the treaty should only be ratified if there were clear reservations as to its applicability to the United States. Once again, Wilson was willing to agree to many of these, and he and Lodge were not, in fact, far apart in what they would accept. What Wilson refused to give way on was Article 10 of the Covenant, which committed members to preserve the territorial integrity of other states from external aggression [*Doc. 8*]. The result was the defeat of the treaty in the Senate on 19 November 1919, and with it United States membership in the League of Nations. It was left to Wilson's successor as president, Warren Harding, to conclude a formal peace with Germany and the other Central Powers with which the United States had been at war. Only on 2 July 1921 did the United States formally declare an end to hostilities and in August 1921 it signed peace treaties with Germany, Austria, and Hungary which ensured it the benefits received by the Allied states, without any of the obligations.

Article 10 lay at the heart of the debate in the United States over membership of the League of Nations. This was the clause by which members agreed to preserve the territorial integrity and independence of all members. France had initially hoped this would take the form of a League military force and, failing that, at least sought a clear enforcement mechanism. Wilson was aware that this would be politically unacceptable in America. Article 10 was a compromise which left it open to the League to decide at the time how each crisis should best be handled. Even the vague commitment implicit in Article 10 worried many, and the Americans were not alone in their concerns. At the very first meeting of the League, in 1920, Canada unsuccessfully tried to have it suppressed. It made another attempt in 1922 to have it agreed that no member could be obliged to go to war without the consent of its parliament or legislature. In 1923, Canada was central to another debate arguing that Article 10 obligations should be interpreted as an optional rather than a binding commitment. Although these efforts did not succeed they enjoyed significant support. Two schools

of thought were evolving as to the role of the League. One, supported by France, saw the League as a vehicle for collective security, the other, which included Britain and its dominions, saw the League as facilitating discussion. With such a divergence it was increasingly unlikely that the League would provide an instrument for ensuring its members against aggression, as would be borne out by events in the 1930s.

The issue of America's rejection of membership in the League of Nations was controversial and deeply divisive in the United States. Later one of Wilson's disciples, Franklin Roosevelt, would engineer American entry into the League's successor, the United Nations. America's absence probably did weaken the League, but the controversy over Article 10 should be seen in a wider context as part of an ongoing debate about how, if at all possible, to arrange for collective security.

ORGANIZATION

The Covenant's preamble set out the objectives of the organization [*Doc. 8*]. The business of the League was divided between three bodies: the Assembly, the Council, and the Secretariat. The Assembly was comprised of up to three representatives from each member state, though each state could cast only one vote. In normal circumstances the Assembly was to meet annually, usually convening in September. It could only discuss issues and make recommendations to the Council, but it controlled the budget, the admission of new members by a two-thirds vote, and the election of non-permanent members to the Council. The League began with forty-two members and by 1925 had grown to fifty-four.

The Council was originally intended to consist of nine members, five permanent and four non-permanent. The original permanent member states were Britain, France, Italy, Japan, and the United States, but with the American rejection its seat was never occupied. In 1925, in the aftermath of the Locarno Pact, Germany was admitted as a permanent member. Later in the League's turbulent history Germany and Italy would resign their memberships, while the Soviet Union was a permanent member during 1934–39. Non-permanent seats were increased to six in 1922 and nine in 1926, with members elected every three years. The Council normally met every four months, but in times of crisis would convene more frequently. In a conflict any member state could bring its grievance before the Council. If a state refused to accept the decision of the Council and continued aggressive activity, the Council's one weapon was to have other members apply economic and financial sanctions against the aggressor. The Council did have the power to recommend military action, but never did so.

A secretary-general appointed by the Council and approved by the Assembly led the Secretariat. The Secretariat saw to the vast amount of

clerical work required by the League. The first secretary-general was Eric Drummond, a British diplomat, who served in that post from 1919 to 1933 and who did much to establish the League as a functional organization.

In terms of innovation the Assembly was a milestone in the development of international relations, a body with a worldwide membership convened not to discuss a particular issue but which held a remit over the entire field of international relations. Here both great and small powers spoke with equality. The Council was, in some ways, an institutionalization of the old Concert system, which had been dominated by the Great Powers, in this instance the permanent members being the great powers. From the beginning it was hoped the United States would take its seat and it was assumed that, in due course, Germany and Russia would as well. Originally it was intended that the Great Powers would enjoy a majority though this never occurred.

The League commenced work in 1920, the headquarters being established at Geneva, in neutral Switzerland. Functioning under the control of the League were several subsidiary political bodies, including the Permanent Commission on Mandates, the High Commission for Danzig, and the Commission overseeing France's occupation of the Saar. There were also a range of technical bodies, the most notable being the Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, the Advisory Committee on Traffic in Opium and Dangerous Drugs, and the Refugee Organization. Finally there were a number of organizations that operated autonomously but which were dependent on the League, including the International Labour Organization and the Permanent Court of International Justice.

The Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ), often referred to as the World Court, located at The Hague in the Netherlands was one of the major innovations of the League. The establishment of this body was the culmination of many centuries of development in international law. Since the sixteenth century there had been increasing discussion of how to apply the rule of law to international relations. The nineteenth century had witnessed the development of treaties by which states agreed to seek arbitration of disputes, and at the 1899 First Hague Conference an International Court of Arbitration was established at The Hague, a body that still exists. The 1907 Second Hague Conference sought to go further, calling for the establishment of a permanent court to settle inter-state judicial issues, but no agreement about its composition was reached before the outbreak of war in 1914. The Covenant provided for such a court, the PCIJ, which was formally opened in December 1922, also at The Hague. States, not individuals, would be the parties before the court, and its services were available to all League members as well as any other states which agreed to accept the jurisdiction of the court and to carry out its decisions. The court was empowered to hear cases concerning interpretation

of treaties, questions of international law, the existence of any fact that if established would constitute a breach of international obligation, and the nature of reparation to be made for any such breach. Although the United States never joined the League, nor adhered to the court, many prominent American jurists served on its bench.

The peace treaties provided for the former overseas colonies of Germany and the Middle East portions of the Ottoman Empire to be placed under the League of Nations, with their administration being provided by various members of the League. The Covenant set out that these territories were to be governed with the interests and progress of the inhabitants as the primary objective. The mandates were classified as 'A', 'B', and 'C'. The 'A' mandates, which were all formerly part of the Ottoman Empire, covered countries whose inhabitants were considered almost ready to run their own affairs. 'B' mandates, comprising most of Germany's former possessions in Africa and the Pacific, were those where it was decided that the inhabitants were not yet prepared to administer their own government; while the 'C' mandates, made up from the remainder of Germany's Pacific colonies, were seen as sufficiently under-developed as to be best administered by the mandatory power as if it were an integral part of its own territory. The mandates system was one of the significant innovations of the League. There were some precedents; for example, the Ionian Islands had been administered in this way by Britain (1815-64) and Morocco, by France after the 1906 Algeiras Conference. The League institutionalized the concept, providing a mechanism for oversight.

The concept behind the mandates system was that these territories were not the spoils of war, but the responsibility of developed states that had entered under formal obligation to govern them in the best interests of the inhabitants with the ultimate intention of preparing them for independence. To ensure that these obligations were being carried out the League established a Permanent Mandates Commission to receive and comment upon the annual reports of the mandatory powers and, in turn, to pass their observations on to the Council of the League. The system was not without its difficulties. Most of the mandates were assigned to states that were also permanent members of the Council. These states, in practice, wished for minimum interference in their administration of their mandates and, using the Council, they successfully blocked members of the permanent Mandates Commission from visiting these territories for inspections. As a result, information was limited to an annual report provided by the mandatory power to the League. Although the Commission had no power to remove a mandatory state or give it instruction, the mere fact of oversight and the obligation to report was a significant step in the growth of international governance.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) was the outcome of the

great demands placed on workers during the war which, in turn, caused their leaders to desire a voice in the postwar order. The Russian Revolution had also increased the demands of workers internationally, even if they did not support Marxist ideology. While the Paris Peace Conference was meeting, a labour union congress was held simultaneously at Berne, Switzerland which called for an international labour parliament. The peacemakers were, therefore, anxious to find a way to provide a voice in international affairs for workers and it responded by setting up a special commission on international labour legislation headed by the American labour leader, Samuel Gompers. Its recommendations led to the creation of the ILO under the League of Nations. The ILO embodied a compromise between the highest expectations of the labour movement and the concerns of government and industry. It was hoped that the ILO would reduce the threat of war by improving labour conditions and living standards through economic and social stability, with its constitution stating its aim as the promotion of 'Lasting Peace Through Social Justice'.

The ILO was provided with an innovative structure for an international organization. The organization comprised three parts, an annual conference, a governing body for coordinating policy, and an International Labour Office. The secretariat collected information on such subjects as child labour and working hours that formed the basis for the ILO's members adopting conventions setting minimum standards. The conference was to meet annually. The member states sent four delegates each, two representing the government, and one each representing employers and workers respectively to the annual conference. Delegates did not have to vote as a state unit and, therefore, it was possible for employers' representatives or labour representatives to vote across state lines. For the first time at an official, international level interest groups were being provided with an independent voice.

The ILO's first meeting was held at Washington, DC, in October 1919 (before the United States rejected membership of the League of Nations), and chose as its first director-general the moderate French Socialist politician Albert Thomas. Despite the setback of American rejection the ILO enjoyed a more universal appeal than even the League, admitting Germany and Austria in 1919. This universality and the effective work of the ILO even led the United States, which otherwise shunned the League, to join the ILO under a special arrangement in 1934.

The Committee on Intellectual Cooperation was another organ of the League, intended to improve the condition of intellectual workers and to promote international contacts. This body looked at ways to protect copyright, promote academic exchanges and provide a clearinghouse for information. It initially suffered from lack of funds until 1924, when the French government offered to establish at Paris an International Institute of

Intellectual Cooperation, working under the committee. The members of the committee were a notable assemblage and included such figures as Albert Einstein and Marie Curie. After the Second World War its work was continued by UNESCO.

THE WORK OF THE LEAGUE

At first many states were sceptical that the League would play a significant role in international relations, particularly after its rejection by the United States. Its utility, though, soon became apparent, solving at least low-level problems and providing a forum in which diplomats and statesmen could meet. Its growing importance can be seen in the first visit by a British prime minister in 1924, and the practice adopted from 1925 by many states of being represented by their foreign minister. Not only did the League and Open Diplomacy flourish, but the meetings in Geneva also provided an opportunity for some quiet and less visible diplomacy.

In the early years of the League its opportunity to resolve major international issues was overshadowed by the continuing existence of the wartime Allied Supreme Council, in the form of the Conference of Ambassadors, which continued to exist until 1924 at Paris. It took the lead in resolving such crises as the Corfu incident of 1923 between Greece and Italy. While the League did not play the primary role in settling the Corfu incident it did assist by applying pressure upon Italy. Only after the 1925 Locarno Pact, and the winding up of the Conference of Ambassadors, did the League Council emerge as the primary international forum. The Great Powers, however, did turn to the League after they had failed to resolve two important crises and, in turn, the League was successful. These accomplishments were settling the German-Polish frontier in Upper Silesia and saving Austria (and later Hungary, Bulgaria and Greece) from financial crises.

The first crisis brought directly before the League was the future of the Åland Islands. These islands had historically formed part of Finland but their population was largely Swedish. Under a treaty of 1856 the islands were permanently demilitarized. The status of the islands arose again when Finland became independent, as a consequence of the Russian revolution, and the Åland islanders, claiming the right of self-determination, demanded annexation to Sweden. The Finnish government granted the islands autonomy in May 1920, but separatist agitation continued and, in June, the secessionist leaders were arrested and charged with treason. This brought about Finno-Swedish tension and later that same month the matter was brought before the League Council. With the consent of the disputants a League commission of jurists was established which recommended, after investigation, that the islands remain within Finland, with a special status and that a new neutralization and demilitarization convention be agreed.

This was accepted by Finland and Sweden and came into effect in 1922, providing the League with its first significant success at resolving international tension.

The League also was responsible for the first bail out of a faltering national economy by an international organization, foreshadowing work that would become the responsibility of the International Monetary Fund after the Second World War. The first country to face financial catastrophe in which the League intervened was Austria. As a result of the war, it no longer lay at the hub of a great empire and its economic life lay in ruins. In 1921, the League had made an abortive attempt to reschedule Austria's debt and impose strict restructuring of the country's finances, but this had foundered on the ambivalent attitude of Washington to a plan initiated by the League of Nations. By 1922, though, Austria was on the verge of collapse, an event that would threaten the fragile stability of central Europe. The League responded by proposing a financial restructuring package with the key powers guaranteeing a \$120 million loan aimed at stabilizing the Austrian economy. The League would have oversight in order to see that reforms were implemented and the loans repaid. The mere announcement of the plan did much to calm the situation, confidence was slowly restored and by 1925 the special League oversight was ended. The League here played a role that no single state could have accomplished.

The League also played a central role in alleviating the refugee crisis spawned by the war. There were not only the refugees brought about by the First World War, but also those caused by the Russian revolution and, then in the wake of the Greco-Turkish war (1921–22), the exodus of over one million ethnic Greeks from Turkey. In 1921 it established the Refugee Organization with Fritjof Nansen as its High Commissioner. Among the many problems the refugees faced was the absence of valid documents that would allow them to cross borders in a return home. The League resolved this by issuing 'Nansen passports' which would enable the refugees to travel across borders. Originally meant as a temporary organization to assist displaced persons, the Refugee Organization became a permanent part of the League's work. Nansen was awarded the 1922 Nobel Peace Prize for his work.

As the League Council came to enjoy enhanced prominence, so its success at fostering cooperation encouraged some to see it as a model for other future developments. In a proposal that, in retrospect, has assumed great importance the French premier, Edouard Herriot, stated in 1925 that he saw in the League of Nations a rough draft for a scheme for a United States of Europe. In 1929 his successor Aristide Briand proposed a scheme for a European Union. The ideas being debated in the years immediately following the First World War provided some of the earliest development of the scheme for the creation of a European Union, based in part on the experience gained from the League of Nations.

CONCLUSION

The reputation of the League has suffered in retrospect from its inability to deter the aggressor states in the 1930s. Some argue that the League, while conceptually sound, ultimately failed because of the times in which it existed and unfortunate circumstances. Failure is variously attributed to the unanticipated rise of aggressor states in the 1930s, the failure of the United States to join, the initial exclusion of Germany and Soviet Russia, the embodying of the Covenant in the peace treaties, thereby associating it with the victors and, as a consequence, preventing it from the start being an organization open to all states. A wider argument is also made that the initial objectives of the League were too ambitious for the international system as it existed and that the League, as a result, could not possibly have been made a more robust structure. In a world of sovereign states, committing in advance to be bound by the decisions of a mutual organization has always proven difficult. It was politically unrealistic to expect that the authors of the Covenant would have accepted any greater derogation of authority to this new creature in international relations. F.H. Hinsley, one of the leading writers on the history of international relations, argued of the League's primary objective of maintaining peace that, 'it is impossible to organise the world on such a principle for very long. However logical and impressive it may seem in theory, it cannot stand the strain of peace-time relationships.'²

The ultimate failure of the League should not be allowed to overshadow its substantive achievements. During the first two years of its existence the League, for example, resolved the Åland Islands dispute between Finland and Sweden, oversaw the repatriation of just under half a million prisoners of war from twenty-six countries, launched a campaign against typhus, and initiated the process of establishing general codes for railways, ports, and waterways. Particularly notable was the appointment of Nansen as High Commissioner for Refugees to deal with the some one and a half million refugees and displaced persons that were one of the results of the war.

Notes

- 1 'publicists': writers on or persons skilled in international law (*jus publicum publicum* public law).
- 2 F.H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 321.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOVIET RUSSIA

EARLY DAYS

In 1917, Lenin and the Bolshevik communists successfully seized power in the Russian capital and rapidly extended their control over many areas of the country. It was not until 1921 before they were firmly in control of the entire country. The forces of the 'Red' communists now became embroiled in a civil war with the anti-communist 'White' forces. Lenin removed Russia from the war, leading to an Allied military intervention intended both to protect the military supplies they had already provided Russia, but also to support the effort of those White Russian leaders who might bring Russia back into the war. The first act of Lenin's regime was the Decree on Peace, issued the day after the revolution, which called for a just and democratic peace, a peace without annexations or indemnities, a peace on the basis of self-determination, and the end of secret diplomacy. In many ways this was much more characteristic of Wilson than Marx. While it seemed even-handed, it was actually anti-Allied. At the time the Central Powers' policy called for no annexations as they planned, instead, on the establishment of puppet states. The Allied powers did plan annexations; for example, France's ambitions to re-annex Alsace-Lorraine, Italy's hopes of seizing the South Tyrol, and the whole web of secret treaties for the division of the Ottoman Empire. When the Bolsheviks took over the foreign ministry at Petrograd they found in the archives copies of the secret treaties and took great glee in publishing them. This action had a great impact and would lead some to argue that the war was no more than an act of Anglo-French expansionism. In this light Lenin's call for no annexations can be seen as a strongly anti-western act.

Lenin was also acting for domestic reasons. Many people expected that the new government would end the war, hopefully without the loss of territory. Lenin was aware, however, that some territory would have to be lost to Russia. It was one reason why he called for a peace without annexations, instead of referring to loss of land, as he knew that the Central Powers intended to create a series of puppet states for example, in Poland,